

# Byrne Avenue Baths

## Rock Ferry, Birkenhead



### **Introduction**

Byrne Avenue baths was opened in 1933 to provide facilities for swimming and recreation for local residents. In the three quarters of a century that followed continued 'Byrne Avenue' provided a place for sport, leisure and social activities for successive generations of Wirral people.

Byrne Avenue Baths faced closure in 1997 as part of Council cost saving but was kept open when local residents and users groups took over management. Sadly, following a long battle to find money to meet mounting maintenance cost the facility finally closed to the public in February 2009 and was handed back to Wirral Council.

Rather than demolish the building, which would mean the pool and adjacent halls would be lost forever, Wirral Council saw an opportunity to include Byrne Avenue Baths in its plans for transferring community buildings into community ownership – if the right partner could be found to take it on.

Over the last 18 months a group of local people who grew up going to Byrne Avenue to learn to swim, play table tennis and football and who now use the centre as parents as well as sportsmen, began talks with the Council to re-open Byrne Avenue Baths as a community-run leisure and community centre once more.

## **Byrne Avenue Community Trust (BACT)**

About BACT

- Set up by group of parents who themselves were (and still are users) all of whom are now successful in business
- Invitation to residents, former user groups and community organisations to join ownership and management

## **Byrne Avenue Community Centre**

The building has always been much more than a pool as it has housed Water Polo, Dancing, Roller Skating, Boxing, Martial arts, Indoor Cricket, Indoor Hockey to name a few.

The building has many assets and we have plans to maximise its potential to secure its future with a much broader range of community based amenities.

## **Plans for Re-Opening**

For Byrne Avenue Baths to re-open the Council asked us to provide proof that we can bring the building into an appropriate state of repair and prove we can generate enough money to run it as a community facility.

We have submitted detailed plans to repair the building to a standard that will allow it to re-open within 9 months, given approval on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2010. A plan for ongoing refurbishment and redevelopment over the following 2 years that will allow us to improve the facilities on offer and increase the revenue generated from their use.

## **Building Report**

Byrne Avenue Baths closed because the Trust that managed it to 2009 was unable to keep up with building and planned maintenance needed in a building nearly 80 years old.

Building surveyors Grantley Lowe Associates report has provided clear indication that the building is structurally solid with exception of the pool surround which will need to be one of the first things to be dealt with if the building is to re-open. Work is also needed to improve the general deterioration associated with a building of this size and age, but deemed to be more superficial than structural.

## **Cost of repairs**

Based on work carried out by our specialist advisers we calculate the total cost of all the repairs and refurbishment we see as needed over the next 3 years to be around £750k with a 25% contingency built in.

If agreement with the Council can be reached we have pledged to carry out this work in two tranches. The first tranche of £350,000 will provide immediate repairs and refurbishment to reopen the pool.

The second phase of work, which we expect to overlap the first phase, will take approximately 3 months and at a cost of approximately £400,000. This will provide refurbishment of the hall side of the building, the upstairs rooms and will include all fitments including leisure equipment.

## **Local builders/workers**

It is our intention to source and utilise local companies for the tendering of the works such as JFW Construction Ltd, M-BE Construction, Northwest Construction, Kimptons plus other local companies.

We are also keen to encourage local skills and apprentice training in contracts let for such works.

## **Community ownership**

Although our plans pre-date the change of Government nationally, they reflect the government's focus on 'Big Society' and offer an example of what can be achieved if councils and local people working together.

We see the 'Big Society' as providing:-

- A closer working relationship with all age community groups
- Better community engagement
- Improvement in community health and well being
- Engagement with local youths and groups to assess their needs and requirements
- Decision making by the local community to the future of this building
- Facilities for disabled groups
- Close working arrangements with other local facilities

The legal entity of the new BACT Board including Local community members is ready to be formally completed as a Charitable Trust on acceptance of the proposal.

## **Staffing**

It is the intention of the BACT board to fill as many of the positions with local people and will implement a training program to support ongoing potential growth.

## **Funding**

Part of the Asset Transfer requirement was the funding and we have approached numerous funding groups. In each case we meet and exceed all the assessment criteria but this cannot be progressed until we have the building under ownership.

Some of the funding groups are as follows:

Sport England  
The Lottery  
Biffa  
Community Builders  
SEIF (Social Enterprise Investment Funding)  
Carbon Trust  
Cammell Lairds  
Tesco  
Levers  
Peter Johnson Foundation  
Peel Holdings  
BT  
Individuals plus Gift Aid  
Charitable Trusts  
Oxton Secret Gardens  
Community Fundraising  
Corporate Sponsorship

With public sector funding cuts looming we have checked where we would stand in securing the funding we need from these partners and have been reassured nothing has changed – if we can get started soon.

We would like the council to consider a contribution to these works from the asset transfer monies put aside by Council Leadership to support transfer of building to community ownership. We suggest that this could be equivalent to the cost of demolition, saved ongoing costs whilst empty, plus the cost of sales and legal transfer of the property/land to a new owner. Consideration could be given to this being split over two fiscal years.

We have also agreed an initial interest free loan from an individual as working capital to re-launch the business.

In conclusion we are still extremely confident that funding can be raised but it is the time of the process that could create issues with another winter approaching.

## **Re-Opening the Centre**

Given the potential of available initial part funding it is proposed that we could open the doors within a six month period. The first full tranche of refurbishment work would, given the available funds, take no more than 9 months from approval being provided.

As part of this work we will be sourcing local labour to tidy the external areas, painting the fence etc.

To address resident concerns over parking we plans to allocate around 15-20 car park spaces within the grounds of the centre and (subject to planning consent) will look to make additional car park provision for users/visitors.

We have submitted a detailed business plan to run the centre without Council subsidy once it is re-opened. To reduce the running costs of a swimming pool, which are without doubt the largest single cost, we plan to install a biomass Combined Heat and Power generator which will dramatically reduce costs as part of what we believe will be one of the most ecologically sustainable Community Centre with Pool in the country! We are also planning to use solar panels, as the centre of the roof area lends itself to this technology.

## **Proposal**

We understand that if we can't get support to re-open Byrne Avenue it is likely to be earmarked for demolition, and the cost of knocking down the building has been estimated to be around £160,000, and sale of the site under current market conditions will see a community asset lost and little in the way of a capital receipt

Whilst its future is decided Wirral Council is spending £23,000 per year keeping Byrne Avenue closed.

Taken together these costs would go a long way towards meeting the first tranche or repair costs we have agreed are needed with the Council.

Our proposal is as follows:

- a) The Community Asset Transfer fund stands as quoted at £4.5m and we request that support of up to £350k over two years (8% of available funds) be provided to reopen the building in a speedy timeframe. Of this £150k will be used to deal with those issues that must be addressed before the centre can be re-opened, with the balance used to redecorate and redo the fixtures and fittings within the changing and pool surround areas.
- b) BACT will source the required funds to complete the refurbishment at an approximate cost of £400k.

We are happy to accept any questions and are willing to meet to discuss any points within this proposal.

We can be contacted via the following:

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